



CAPTivations

Success Stories in Prevention

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Mike Lowther
Director

Debbie Blasiar
Associate Director

Janette Cline
Coordinator of Field Operations

LaDonna Coy
Coordinator,
Products and Technology

Sandra Fisher
Administrative Assistant

Brenda Powell
Product Development Associate

Bonny Million
Communications Specialist

Carl Shackelford
State Liaison

Joanie Liebman
State Liaison

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State Liaison

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State Liaison

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State Liaison

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State Liaison

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Jenni Bivens
Secretary

Adelina Howard
Fiscal Assistant

Katherine Birdsall
Support Staff

Patty Martin
Project Director

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South Central New Mexico Prevention Coalition

Schools and other educational groups can spend all day teaching children about the dangers of tobacco use, but the message may fall on deaf ears if these same children see smoking as an accepted practice in their community's public buildings.

Thanks to the efforts of the South Central New Mexico Prevention Coalition and Tobacco Free Las Cruces Coalition, the youth of Dona Ana County won't see much smoking in public. Beginning on Valentine's Day 2002, smoking was banned in public places including workplaces in unincorporated areas of Dona Ana County, and within 50 feet of entrances and exits of these buildings.

"Our main push was that this was a public health issue," said Amy Buchanan, project administrator for the South Central New Mexico Prevention Coalition, an active member of Tobacco Free

Las Cruces. "It's about the safety of the employees. If there are employees there, then you can't smoke."

Tobacco

Free Las Cruces has had experience getting smoke free ordinances passed. Las Cruces, which sits in Dona Ana County, has had a similar ordinance in place since the mid-90s that prohibits smoking in most public buildings, including restaurants, but allows smoking in bars. In recent years, the ordinance has been strengthened to prohibit smoking in bingo halls and bowling alleys.

Tobacco Free Las Cruces also worked with the City of El Paso, Texas, just across the border, to help it pass a smoke-free ordinance at the beginning of 2002, that covers most public buildings, including restaurants and bars.

Las Cruces and Dona Ana County sit on the border of Mexico and Texas, with El Paso being its main media market. It is the home of New Mexico State University and has a county-wide population of 170,000, the second-largest metropolitan area in the state. Sixty-eight percent of its population is Hispanic, and 28 percent is non-Hispanic white. The area is considered the fifth poorest in the nation, with its primary industry being agriculture.

The South Central New Mexico Prevention Coalition has five grants, including a state incentive grant from the New Mexico Department of Health Behavioral Health Services Department, to focus on substance abuse prevention in Dona Ana County. They were able to get key players on board, such as the Sheriff's Department, which reported it would not be a burdensome on law enforcement to enforce the ordinance.

Buchanan stated that it only took the prevention coalition and Tobacco Free Las Cruces five months to get the county-wide clean air ordinance passed. The coalitions met with the legal departments to develop a workable policy, and met with the commissioners multiple times to explain the public health concerns to those who were concerned about not wanting to tell people how to run their businesses.

It helped, too, Buchanan notes, that the prevention coalition – which operates under the county's health and human services department – had just gotten funding from the New Mexico Department of Health

Tobacco Use Prevention and Control. The funds are to be used solely for the reduction and prevention of tobacco use by both youth and adults. The grant will be used to increase the number of smoking cessation programs available in the county, promoting the Great American Smokeout, assessing smoking policies, decreasing the amount of second hand smoke people are exposed to, and other projects.

"Here we had money coming into the area to prevent substance and tobacco use, . . . and this policy complements that," Buchanan said of the ordinance. "It just made sense."

Aside from some bar owners, the smoke free ordinance faced very little opposition until after it passed. Then, some nursing homes complained because

Tobacco Free Las Cruces has had experience getting smoke free ordinances passed.



residents who smoked were now forced to move fifty feet from the entrances to smoke, and felt they were being deprived of their "last comfort." Buchanan said the Tobacco Free Las Cruces Coalition is meeting with these nursing homes to come up with suggestions for compromise. However, Buchanan said the county Americans with Disabilities Act coordinator has assessed the issue and noted that in an environment with second-hand smoke, employees with lung ailments can't work there, and residents with lung ailments can't live there.

The prevention coalition doesn't just work to pass ordinances. It is completing its final year of a three-year State Incentive Grant, which it used for a Friendly PEERSuasion program. Friendly PEERSuasion targets teen moms, who were in an alternative high school program, and middle school girls who were at risk of becoming teen moms. The program helps them learn how to avoid using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

The heart of the program was a science-based curriculum in the classrooms, designed to teach the girls not only about substance abuse and refusal skills, but also communication skills and stress management. The curriculum was delivered in the schools at least bi-weekly during the school year.

The girls in the program made presentations to their peers and younger students on what they learned in the classroom about substance abuse prevention and their new skills on communication and stress management, Buchanan said.



In addition, the girls went on weekend retreats in the nearby mountains. There, they

not only had the lessons reinforced through leadership training sessions and ropes courses, they also had the opportunity to

enjoy experiences such as Mary Kay make-overs. Many of these girls had not previously had these kinds of experiences in their lives, Buchanan said.

Another component of the Friendly PEERSuasion program was community service. The girls at each of the six participating school sites took part in a Service Learning community project. The students worked with a community social service agency to develop a needs assessment, develop a program, and write a grant to the school district to fund the program. This not only gave the girls a sense of helping others, it also gave them a chance to apply math, writing, and organizational skills in a real-world situation.

Friendly PEERSuasion also contained an environmental component. The students assessed alcohol advertising, such as posters in convenience stores and billboards, to determine who the ads are targeting and

whether such ads might have a detrimental effect on youth. Convenience stores that the students recognized as complying with no sales to minors laws, and not displaying alcohol advertising posters targeting youth, received positive recognition from the Friendly PEERSuasion group.

The State Incentive Grant that is funding the Friendly PEERSuasion program is now ending its third and final year, Buchanan said. The results have been promising among the teenage mothers in the program. In fiscal year 2000, the latest year's figures were available. The girls showed a stabilization in drug use, depression rates and in the number of physical fights they participated in. They also reported an increase in the perception that adults in the community think it is wrong for youth to try drugs.

The prevention coalition is now submitting a new grant proposal to the state Department of Health Behavioral Health Services to try a new program, Creating Lasting Family Connections. This new program, Buchanan said, targets younger students. It involves the families as well as the youth, and will include the same schools and agencies involved in the Friendly PEERSuasion program.

"We tell the kids 'Don't smoke, don't smoke,' and then they go home, and their parents are smoking," she said. "So we need to bring the families into it."

Acknowledgements:

Tanja Edwards, MHR
Author and Interviewer

Glenda Lewin Hufnagel, PhD
Editor

LaDonna Coy, MHR
Editor

Brenda Powell
Design/Format/Layout

Contact Information:

CSAP's Southwest Center for the
Application of Prevention
Technologies
555 Constitution Avenue
Suite 132
Norman, OK 73071
(800) 853-2572
(405) 325-1454
FAX (405) 325-7092
www.swcapt.org

Success Story

South Central New Mexico
Prevention Coalition
136 South Water Street
Las Cruces, NM 88005
Attention: Amy Buchanan
Phone: 505-524-8951
e-mail: amyb@co.dona-ana.nm.us

Resources:

Center for Substance Abuse
Prevention
www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html

Decision Support System
www.preventionondss.org

Join Together
www.jointogether.org

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